

Why Is That Guy



Photo by PH12 Matthew J. Thomas

Under His Desk?

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Sometimes, when you think all is well and you are in your “bubble” of daily routine, something happens to make you realize you should never let down your guard. Such was the case one morning at Prince Sultan Air Base, Saudi Arabia.

I was maintenance control chief, preparing for flight operations supporting Operation Southern Watch. Our squadron jets were ready, and the aircrew had started reviewing the aircraft discrepancy books before their flight. Once the aircrew had finished with the books, they went to the paraloft to put on flight gear and then returned so I could issue their weapons.

The checkout routine was always the same: Each crew member came to the issue window. I would sign them out a weapon, first verifying it wasn't loaded, and hand it to the aviator grip-first, with the slide back, along with a magazine of ammunition. The aviator would point the weapon into the clearing barrel, release the slide and hammer (using the slide stop and decocking lever). Then he could insert the magazine.

On this day, the first customer who came to the window was an 0-4. He had a familiarization (fam)

brief and a fam firing before he had left the states, and he was fully qualified to handle the 9 mm, M-11 compact pistol.

I issued him the pistol and magazine, but then my attention was diverted by someone asking a question about the status of one of our aircraft. While I was answering the question, the aviator pointed the weapon into the clearing barrel, inserted the magazine, released the slide, and pulled the trigger. The weapon discharged—quite loudly—I might add. Instantly, the office went silent, and everybody stared (with eyes as wide as saucers) at the guy with the weapon—except for the person who had taken cover under his desk.

Unfortunately, not following standard procedures led to his firing the pistol. Fortunately, he had fired into the clearing barrel, and no one was hurt.

We stopped weapon issue and reviewed our procedures. We eliminated the risk of this hazard being repeated with a procedural change: We no longer issue ammunition until the slide and hammer have been released. ■